



PATRICK TESTIN STATE SENATOR

Op-Ed: Intellectual Diversity Helps Students Grow

I'm an alumnus of UW-Stevens Point – and I'm a proud Pointer through and through. However, a recent decision by the university's Student Government Alliance (SGA) has me concerned. The SGA rejected a request for recognition from Turning Point USA, a non-profit youth organization that promotes free market principles that already has a presence on over 1,000 college and high school campuses across the country. I believe this decision stifles the free expression of ideas on campus and is antithetical to the mission of the university.

One goal of colleges and universities is to prepare young people to be active and engaged participants in society. To this end, they should be teaching students how to think – not what to think. A well-rounded education requires exposure to different viewpoints. This intellectual diversity encourages students to challenge themselves and grow into more nuanced thinkers. As a former student senator, I voted to recognize groups whose mission I disagreed with, because I understood the importance of diverse perspectives in our public dialogue.

I believe the SGA's decision encourages students to adopt a fearful, insulated mentality that will lead to increased stridency in our political discourse. At its best, communication breaks down barriers between people; even if two people don't agree at the end of a discussion, they should be able to walk away with a better understanding of each other, and hopefully, a mutual respect. The SGA's rejection of a group that advocates free market principles hinders communication by shutting out an important voice from the discussion, and sends the message to students that these views should be marginalized. Those on campus who happen to agree with the organization's views are left feeling unwelcome, unwanted, and unheard. The resulting division erects barriers between people, and causes all parties involved to calcify their beliefs and to view each other with enmity. This inhibits society's ability to function, and creates the negative atmosphere in modern politics. Both liberals and conservatives have contributed to this problem, and it is up to both liberals and conservatives to fix it.

I'm encouraged that UWSP's Vice Chancellor is considering a reversal of the decision. I hope that he will stand for the principle of free speech that has been so important to the university in the past. Additionally, I hope that members of the SGA will take this opportunity to reevaluate their decision, and come to embrace ideological diversity on campus. Tyranny thrives in a vacuum. By keeping the marketplace of ideas open and free, we ensure that the best ideas keep us moving forward together.

Wisconsin State Senate
24th Senate District



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